

Anasarca

Thomas P. Rives

Admitted March 24. 1819

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To Robert P. Downman M.D

Influenced, Sir, not only by
a consideration of your high medical
qualifications, but also affected with
a sense of your politeness towards me,
& the advantage which I derived from
your instructions, the following
Inaugural Dissertation is very
respectfully dedicated to you,
by your.
Friend & Pupil
The Author.

To Mr. J. B. Brown

My dear Sir,
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the purchase of a lot of land in the town of New York, and in answer to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Yours,
J. B. Brown

An Inaugural

Dissertation

On Anasarca

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On Anasarca.

Previous to the immediate consideration of the subject which I have selected, I will make a few remarks, on the nature of dropsy generally.

Dropsy may be defined a premature collection of a serous or watery fluid, in some part of the body.

In a healthy state of the system, there is always a considerable quantity of fluid thrown into every cavity of the body, which is taken up, by the Lymphatics.

In a large majority of cases, dropsy is the result of an increased exhalation of this fluid. —

In a pathological point of view,

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Dr. Rush

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Atonic, it
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we may distinguish it into Tonic & Atonic.

Examining the works of European writers, we will find, that most of them consider it as a disease originating in debility. But that it is also frequently associated with an excited and febrile state of the system, is a fact which was first clearly established in this country, by the late distinguished Dr. Rush.

Dr. Blashall considers the urine as a criterion, whereby we may discriminate between the two species of Dropsy. In the Tonic, he says, the urine is scanty, high coloured, deposits no sediment, and coagulates by heat and the Nitric acid. In the Atonic, it is pale, scanty &c, but does not coagulate as the former. But I consider the pulse (the grand Index of the system) as

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(^c) Anasarca first discovers itself, by a swelling of the feet and ankles, appearing in the morning, & disappearing for a time in the morning; the tumefaction is soft & inelastic, indentations being made, permanent by pressure. Gradually the swelling descends, occupying the abdomen, or extending higher up, so as to constitute an universal anasarca. There is now difficult & noisy respiration, the circulation morbid, of the lungs being air-spiced, the heart enlarged, the urine scanty, the surface dry, & combined with more or less febrile action. As the disease advances, there is much torpor & distension, and ultimately the patient sinks by debility.

The cause of Anasarca are the same as those of dropsy generally, to wit,

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proceeding downwards, as the Intermittent Fever,
Dysentery, Diarrhea, Phthisis,
Cerebral affections, or Scatula. and
Hydrops, Visceral affections. Sometimes dropsy
is the consequence of debility, when we may
suppose the absorbent apparatus to be deficient
in action. Thaw drinking is also a frequent
cause.

In the case of Anasarca we
form two general indications, 1st to evacuate
the water collected & 2nd To prevent a
reaccumulation.

I have before remarked, that there
are two forms of dropsy, namely the Tonic
& Atonic. I shall first treat of the reme-
dies proper for the Tonic form, or that attended
with an excited state of the system.

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Where the means usually resorted to for depleting and reducing the system becomes necessary. —

Venesection. The pulse being full and active, accompanied also with other marks of a phlogistic diathesis, we cannot hesitate as to the propriety of the remedy. In the use of bloodletting, we must be regulated by the state of the system, and the degree of arterial excitement. In some cases, freely copious & repeated bleeding is requisite; in other cases only moderate bleeding.

Cathartics. These constitute a very important class of medicines, in the treatment of dropsy. They operate by diminishing inflammatory action, & invigorating the powers of absorption. Formerly it was customary to give the most drastic. With

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much more benefit, can we resort to the
Saline & Tartrate preparations. The
Super-tartrate of Potash & Salap in combination,
are the most important articles of this class.

Their effects are sometimes exceedingly prompt;
& they have often disordered dropical
resistings, without the aid of any other
remedy.

Diuretics. At the head of this list,
the bromide tartar indiguitably stands. At
present it meets with the concurrent approbation
of physicians. It was originally introduced
to public notice, by Dr. Home of Edinburgh,
who frequently uses it in a combined operation
on the kidneys & bowels. When we wish
to augment its diuretic power, we should
give at the same time a considerable
quantity of water. It is now generally admitted,
although hitherto a subject of dispute,

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among physicians, that it is unnecessary to
restrain patients in the use of water. The
stimulating effect ^{of medicine} ~~of medicine~~ ^{of medicine} is increased
increased.

Pilla Maritima. This is an invaluable
remedy in every variety of dropsy. It must
be recollected, however, that it is stimulant
in its operation, & hence improper, when the
disease is accompanied with fibrile action. It
is highly improved by a combination with
Calomel. With respect to the dose, it should
be given so as to excite a moderate degree
of nausea.

Particularly adapted to fibrile cases
is the *Pilla Petasæ*. The continued use
of this medicine has the effect of impairing
the digestive organs; & hence when it has
been employed sufficiently long to render it

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efficacy, without producing satisfactory results, it should be discontinued. As a substitute, we may use the Spts. of Arsenic Nitro, which in order to be of any efficacy must be liberally employed, as in the anodyne, iij or ziv.

Fixed Alkalis— are also recommended as pretty good diuretics, of which the Potash seems preferable.

Some of the Alliaceae are occasionally employed as diuretics.

Sium Prostratum. This though a medicinal remedy, is yet an active diuretic. Every part of the plant possesses this property, but the root in decoction is preferable.

Diaphoretics have sometimes been productive

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of very beneficial effect. When other means
have been unavailingly used they are well
worthy of a trial.

Mercury. In southern climates, dropsy
is very frequently associated, with visceral
affections, & in those cases, mercury becomes
indispensably necessary. It should be used
to the extent of a moderate salivation.

In closing this part of my subject, I
might here enumerate, Abstinence. Low
diet, hard labour, fear, & other causes, ~~the~~
evidently of a debilitating nature, which
have occasionally done good, in this species
of dropsy. Several success cases are related
by Dr. Rush.

I proceed secondly to consider the
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namely, the Tonics.

The remedies here, should be such stimulant substances, as are calculated to excite general vigor, or determine the fluxus, to the urinary organs.

Tonics. The best tonic medicines are the Peruvian Bark, vegetable Bitters, & Chalybeats. The diet should be nutritive, & Exercise particularly enjoined, proportioned to the strength of the patient. It should be of the active kind, such as, marching, walking & riding on horseback.

Diuretics. The first of this Stimulant diuretics which I shall name, is the Polygalis *Minor*. Being tonic and actively diuretic, it is well adapted, to those cases attended with an increased

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The *Pyrola Umbellata*, known also by the name of *Dipsosiphon*, has been lately introduced as a remedy for dropsy, & is represented to have been beneficial. Being analogous to the preceding article, it is worthy of a further trial.

The violence of Catarrhes, in very active diuresis in those cases, & should be cautiously employed, as its irritating effects are thereby prevented.

Eupatium Perfoliatum.

Being tonic & diaphoretic, it appears well adapted to those cases, originating in Menstrual obstructions.

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a priori, from the well known operation
of digitalis, that it ought to be located
with those remedies, for the preceding form
of anaemia, but experience has proven
its inutility. It was originally introduced
by the celebrated Dr Withering, with
high commendations. Various Physicians
have been the echoers, with regard to its
efficacy. Dr Ferriar relates a great
many cases, in which comparative trials
were made with the digitalis & the
Sperulatus Polaga, from which it appears
that the latter medicine was, very
far superior. Nevertheless abundant
testimony could be adduced of its power,
in almost every species of dropsy; and we
may suppose that the diversities account
have originated from the administration
of the medicine, in different states of the
system. Dr Chapman is of opinion

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that it is in atonic cases, that the medicine decidedly displays its best powers. We

should be cautious not to proceed too fast with the medicine, unless its mode of operation be evident, as it possesses the peculiarity of remaining dormant for some time, & of suddenly developing its full effects.—

It now remains to consider the local treatment of Anasarca, having detailed the most important general Remedies.

When the extremities are much distended with water, which is accompanied with considerable uneasiness, much relief may be obtained, by evacuating it. This should be effected by making small punctures with a lancet; which should not be too deep, as

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Erysipelatos, inflammation & gangrene might otherwise result. These affections sometimes occur in cellular dropsy, especially in the extremities.

Either from the extreme distension produced by the effused fluid, or from the toxic action of the capillary vessels, the vitality of the integuments is occasionally so much impaired, as to cause gangrene or mortification.

Under such circumstances, blisters which are so beneficial to arrest the progress of mortification, preceded by inflammation, (and which I would have more introduced by Dr. Physic) are totally inadmissible: indeed they sometimes occasion the very mischief in question.

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Dr. Chapman, is to compress the extremity
both above & below ^{the part affected} with a flannel roller
tightly applied. This operates on 2 principles
easily applicable; namely by impairing tone
& warmth to the encased ~~limb~~ ^{limb} whereby it is
enabled to resist the farther extension of
the putrefactive process. This method of
treatment, I believe, originated with Dr
Chapman. X

It only remains now, for me to
describe the method of fulfilling the
second general indication of cure, to wit,
to prevent the reaccumulation of water.

When the case, is in some degree local,
frictions & the laced stocking are of
considerable service, in preventing the
reproduction of water.—

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With respect to the general remedies, we should resort to Tonics, the best of which are the Cinchona & Chalybeates.

Should Tonics not prove effectual, but on the contrary should there ^{be} a strong disposition to an accumulation of water, we must endeavor to change the state of the system, by introducing Mercury gradually, as an alterative. If the patient should be incapable of bearing the operation of this medicine, the Nitric Acid may be advantageously substituted.

The diet should be nutritive, and Exercise particularly enforced. The latter has of itself frequently effected a cure of the Dropsy.

Finis.

